

“Body and Soul: We Belong”



Discussion Guide

In increasing numbers, Christians are searching for a faithful response in the church’s conversation about what it means to welcome and affirm people of all sexual identities and gender expressions. This video resource invites viewers to explore that question through six themes central to the Reformed tradition that are woven through the liturgies and [confessional standards](#) of the Reformed Church in America. We encourage you to make use of this discussion guide as you view the accompanying video, pausing after each section to engage in reflection and conversation. The questions provided are based on the video content, Scripture, and Reformed confessions or liturgies.

For further exploration, the appendix at the end of this guide summarizes each theme and supplies specific references to [The Heidelberg Catechism](#), [The Belgic Confession](#), [The Confession of Belhar](#), and the [Liturgy for Baptism](#).

This resource was designed for congregational, campus, classis or other settings throughout the Reformed Church in America and the wider ecumenical community, as together we seek to reflect and extend the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

Note: The content of the opening parables in this video resource are a collaborative effort by [Parachute Productions, LLC](#) and members of the Board of Directors of [Room for All, Inc.](#) Participants in the conversations that follow each parable speak from their own faith and life experiences; their words are their own. This project was made possible by a grant from The Collegiate Church Corporation of New York. © Room for All, Inc., 2014. All rights reserved.

Theme # 1: BELONGING

Scripture: Isaiah 41: 9-10

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the “Belonging” section of the video

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect on the reasons why Julia felt she didn't belong in her family, and later never doubted it. (Who had control over that change, and how was her life affected before and after that point of affirmation?)
2. Please share a story about a time when you knew that you truly belonged, or didn't belong. What were the circumstances, and how did you feel?
3. Some speakers in the video talk about the church as a family. Why might anyone doubt they belong to their church family? What are some positive/negative and verbal/non-verbal ways churches can affect that feeling?
4. “My only comfort in life and in death is that I belong, body and soul, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Who was Jesus most welcoming and hospitable toward? How might a congregation's welcoming or non-welcoming attitude affect someone's ability to apply that “comfort” to themselves?
5. Is it important to you that we belong “body and soul” to Jesus? Do you think it's hard to link our physicality with the promise that we belong to Jesus? How might this apply to our sexual identity or gender expression?
6. Reflect on your own experiences as - or with - a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) person. How has your church family responded to LGBTQ people? What do you hope might change about your church's response?
7. What would you like to say to the speaker in the video whose pastor said that gay people are not welcome at the Lord's Table? What would you like to say to the pastor? To the congregation?
8. What would happen if the church fully welcomed and affirmed people of diverse sexual identities or gender expressions? Do you think this is the “new frontier” for the church?

Closing:

Read the opening passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. In the parable, Virginia blunders her way through a conversation about a sensitive topic. What if Julia had not yet “worked through it?” What are some grace-filled ways to approach a conversation with someone who is struggling to belong?

2. What's the difference between fitting in and belonging? Tolerance and acceptance? Welcoming and affirming?
 3. The doctrine of election (chosen by God) is part of Reformed understanding; some Reformed scholars have also said that God chose Christ, and in Christ, all belong. How do you understand this?
 4. A thoughtful conversation about belonging includes the underside - "otherness" – and consideration of concepts like majority identity, privilege, prejudice and xenophobia (fear of "the other"). What thoughts or emotions do such terms evoke? Can you recall any stories of Jesus' interaction with people whom others shunned? Can you recall an experience when you were surprised about an interaction with someone unlike yourself?
 5. What might it be like to move from doubt and rejection to affirmation and belonging, hearing the words, "God knew this day?" How can the church offer that reconciliation?
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Theme # 2: BAPTISM

Scripture: Galatians 3: 27-29

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the "Baptism" section of the video

Questions for Reflection:

1. The parable depicts an unlikely scenario in order to get at the heart of baptism. What do you love about baptism? What does your own baptism mean to you?
2. *"All this for you, little one, though you know nothing of it as yet. We love because God first loved us."* The parable ends before those words would be spoken in the baptismal liturgy. Imagine how hearing them could affect the response of the two people who advocate for a conditional "We do."
3. In Reformed understanding, baptism is a "sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people" and the liturgy refers to the one being baptized as a "child of the covenant." In a sentence or two, what do you understand this covenant to be? Who established it? Is it conditional? Who else makes promises at baptism, and what are they?
4. Do you think some people are more or less worthy or deserving of God's love? Under what conditions do you think a church should withhold or withdraw its baptismal promises?
5. If baptism is "the sign and seal of God's saving grace," as one speaker puts it, what could be communicated to someone who is rejected by his or her church for being LGBTQ? What effect would such a message have on you as an LGBTQ or "straight" person?

6. “Love the sinner, hate the sin” has become a popular slogan in regard to same-sex relationships. How do you hear those words as a “straight” or LGBTQ person? What would be a baptism-affirming mantra?
7. How do you think a church should respond to LGBTQ people who seek baptism for themselves or their children? What if an LGBTQ person wants to be ordained to the office of elder, deacon, or minister of Word and Sacrament?
8. How do you think your church would be different if everyone were to remember that they were baptized each time they gather for worship?

Closing:

Read the opening passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. One speaker notes that in baptism, we are ordained as evangelists*. Do you identify with that role? Why or why not?

** “I declare that this child is now... engaged to confess the faith of Christ and to be God’s faithful servant until life’s end” (RCA Liturgy for Infant Baptism). “By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to love and serve those with whom they live and work” RCA Liturgy for Profession of Faith and Adult Baptism).*

2. Have you ever felt hindered from pursuing a role that you felt God was calling you to? What has held you back?
 3. “We are constantly living between the dust of the earth and our baptismal waters” (anonymous). What does that statement mean to you and for you?
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Theme # 3: Faith and Freedom

Scripture: Galatians 5: 13-15

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the “Faith and Freedom” section of the video

Questions for Reflection:

1. Where do you find God in the video parable?
2. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5: 1). In what ways does Jesus’ life, death and resurrection free us? Is it freedom for, or freedom from? Are we really free, or obligated?
3. One speaker says the power of the resurrection frees us to take risks. Is there a risk you have taken in response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ?

4. How you think freedom in Christ applies in the church's conversations about LGBTQ inclusion? What difference do our choices make in the eyes of a watching world?
5. What is at stake for you personally with regard to LGBTQ inclusion? What risks are involved when a church chooses to welcome and affirm LGBTQ people?
6. How might God's grace inform your response to someone who identifies as LGBTQ and Christian and is struggling with self-hatred?
7. Are there some matters of Christian faith and life about which Christians can – or cannot – “agree to disagree?” Is LGBTQ inclusiveness one of them?
8. In your experience, should the church be “a place where we could come and be exactly who we are?” What would such a church be like? What role has your church played in your becoming who you are in Christ?

Closing:

Read the opening passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. In the parable, Jeremy says he's not returning to the house project to “make a statement.” By not making a statement, what statement is Jeremy making? In your experience, what difference does such an attitude make in engaging with people who believe differently about LGBTQ inclusion?
2. Have you ever felt that being a Christian is about following a set of rules? What influenced that impression? Has it changed?
3. Emily says Jeremy makes it sound easy to love. What makes it difficult to love someone? Is it harder to love when you've been wronged, or told you're wrong?
4. Reflect on the connection between feeling loved and giving love. In your experience, does that relationship apply to God's love, as well? What are ways in which you feel assured that God loves you?
5. Reformed faith is sometimes summed up in the phrase, “Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A #2). How would you explain the meaning of that phrase to someone new to the church?
6. Do you think Jesus was free to set us free? How does your answer affect your faith?
7. One of the speakers talks about the need to go about the work of inclusion “in the character with which Christ would go about it, and to not lose our souls in the service of God's expanding church.” What do you think that means, and how can we prevent it from happening?

Theme # 4: Mission

Scripture: Matthew 5: 13-16

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the “Mission” section of the video

Questions for Reflection:

1. In reviewing the architect’s sketches, the pastor says, “I see where you’re going with this.” What do you think the pastor is seeing in each of the three church models (in a bubble, sterile, and gazebo in a park)? Do any of these metaphors ring true for you?
2. What do you think is the most essential reason for the church to be engaged in mission?
3. Is it important for the church to be relevant in the eyes of those outside the church? Why or why not?
4. If you are LGBTQ, what does the wider church look like from the perspective of people in the LGBTQ community? Your own church? What has contributed to that perspective? If you identify as “straight,” how would you respond to these questions, or to the LGBTQ people in the group?
5. In considering its response to LGBTQ Christians, do you think it’s enough for the church to say “All are welcome?” Why or why not? What are some ways to let LGBTQ people and families know that they will not risk ostracism if they come to your church? Is that enough?
6. In its efforts to communicate hospitality toward LGBTQ people and their families, how can a church avoid a “mission project” approach in education, pastoral care or outreach? What are specific ways a congregation can communicate humility, generosity, and partnership?
7. One speaker says that Jesus is always out in front of the church. Where do you see Jesus in the church’s conversations about welcoming and affirming people of all sexual identities and gender expressions?
8. The Belhar Confession, written during apartheid in South Africa, says that “God’s life-giving Word and Spirit... will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.” What signs of “new obedience” has the church exhibited in your lifetime in society and the world? What new possibilities do you hope for?

Closing:

Read the opening passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like a token representative of a particular minority? How has that affected your contribution to the group or organization that you've been invited into?
2. Have you ever felt that that a group's welcome was for the purpose of imposing a particular way of thinking rather than about partnering in the mission of that group? Do you share the video speaker's concern about that in regard to the church's mission posture today?
3. What difference do you think it would have made to Greeks, slaves or women in Paul's day if he had written in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer [any distinction], for all of you are one in Christ Jesus?" Instead, why do you think he specifically named "Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female?"
4. What is the difference between *seeking* people who are on the margins of society, as opposed to welcoming them? Which comes closer to your understanding of mission?
5. Reformed theology understands the culture beyond the church as the arena where God's kingdom will be fully realized through the transforming work of Jesus Christ. What does this understanding say to you about your role in the culture that surrounds you? Your church's role?

Theme # 5: SCRIPTURE**Scripture: Psalm 19: 7-10**

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the "Scripture" section of the video**Questions for Reflection:**

1. In the parable, one of the friends says the other is "missing the point" about interpreting Scripture to inform our daily life. If Scripture is the written Word of God (Belgic Confession Art. 3) what are the risks in engaging with it and having a conversation with it? What are the risks in not engaging Scripture in that way?
2. Describe your first exposure to the Bible. Was the authority of Scripture presented to you more as "formula" or "practice?" How do you understand the Bible's authority today?
3. One of the speakers quotes an RCA Commission on Theology statement, "Scripture is infallible in all that it intends to teach." Do you agree or disagree? (Note: The full sentence is: "Scripture as the word of the faithful God is infallible and inerrant in all that it intends to teach and accomplish concerning faith and life." See *Minutes of the General Synod, 1963, pp. 264-267*)
4. Can you summarize in a sentence or two what you think God intends to teach and accomplish through Scripture? (Or, as one speaker puts it, what is the "big arc of the story?")

5. If “the lens through which all of Scripture must be viewed is Jesus Christ,” how does a “Jesus-lens” clarify or magnify your understanding of Scripture?
6. Do you think that the over-arching message of Scripture is being well-communicated to the LGBTQ community?
7. What are some biblical passages or stories that you think indicate - or do not indicate - the welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ people in the church?
8. How can the church create trust and safety for LGBTQ persons who have been hurt by and are afraid of what have come to be known as the “clobber passages” (verses that have been used to condemn same-sex relationships)?

Closing:

Read the opening passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. Under what circumstances are you most likely to turn to Scripture?
2. Do you expect that God is “going to be there” when you read the Bible?
3. What considerations do you take into account when reading the Bible in order to best hear how the Word is speaking through the Holy Spirit today?
4. Why do you think we sometimes take Bible verses out of context? Why do we sometimes disregard verses that we don’t understand or agree with? How can we avoid these tendencies?
5. Reformed theology indicates that we know God by two means (sometimes referred to as “general revelation” and “special revelation”): First, in the universe around us; second (and most clearly), through God’s Word, where we learn “as much as we need in this life for God’s glory and our salvation.” (See footnote 12 in “Six Reformed Themes” notes.)

Against that backdrop, how do you hold these two forms of revelation in balance with regard to LGBTQ people as the sciences continually contribute to “general revelation?”

Theme # 6: SOVEREIGNTY

Scripture: Matthew 6: 26-29

As someone reads the passage, listen for a word or phrase that stands out, and reflect silently or aloud on what touches you.

View the “Sovereignty” section of the video

Questions for Reflection:

1. "I'm just thankful it's not up to us, and God is the one in control." If it were up to you, how would you restructure the world? What might be the benefit or cost of your changes?
2. If you identify as LGBTQ, what do you wish people understood about you?
3. Do you ever wonder if God is in control? What is comforting or problematic about that?
4. Several of the speakers in the video reveal an understanding of God's sovereignty that emphasizes both God's transcendence ("above us") and God's immanence ("with us"). In which sense do you most often think of God? Has that changed during your lifetime?
5. What do you think is God's priority in relationship to humanity? How does your response speak to marginalized people or groups of people?
6. The Belgic Confession says that the universe is like a beautiful book in which all creatures are like "letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God." What do LGBTQ people, or being LGBTQ, cause you to ponder about God's sovereignty?
7. The Bible commands us first to love God, and to love others as we love ourselves. Do you think that welcoming and affirming LGBTQ people would bring healing to any of these three relationships?
8. One speaker quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that "the arc of the universe bends towards justice," and says she believes that "we're heading in a direction where God's will will win out in the end." What do you think is God's will regarding LGBTQ inclusiveness? Do you see glimpses of God's will being "done on earth" and in the church?

Closing:

Read the passage aloud again. Do you hear anything else in the passage? Reflect silently or aloud about what you have experienced in this conversation, and what it may call you to. Invite closing prayer.

Optional Questions:

1. How has God been speaking to you today and/or during this video series?
2. What is one thing you would like to do in response?
3. What is one thing you would like your church to do?
4. What would you like The Reformed Church in America to do?

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Six Reformed Themes with References

1. **Belonging**¹ – This theme introduces a core reality for the RCA (and the broader family of God) and will be the entry point by which people at all different places in the church find common ground. We belong to God² and to one another in ways that are enduring and durable. We are family. We belong here – together.
2. **Baptism** – This powerful theme carries several layers of meaning to the Reformed heart and mind. Being sacramental³, it ties our spiritual selves to our created, bodily selves who need tangible signs of God’s enduring love⁴ and our place in the community of God. It also demonstrates that God’s love spans the entirety of our lives and that God’s redeeming purposes for us are set in motion even before our birth.⁵ It recognizes that our relationship with God is tied firmly to our relationship with each other.⁶ Finally, baptism carries with it powerful imagery of unity, inclusion and equality.⁷
3. **Faith & Freedom** – God’s gracious gift of faith is indeed transformative in life-giving ways and compels us to love, but the parallel process taking place is the expression of our individual freedom. We are ultimately responsible if we turn away from God’s love and choose hatred.

¹ Heidelberg Catechism Question & Answer #1: **Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?** A. That I am not my own, but *belong*—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

² The very significant Reformed theme of covenantal relationships could weave through this theme as well as Baptism – our belonging is rooted in God’s promises and is sustained by God’s faithfulness.

³ HC Q&A 66 “**Q. What are sacraments?** A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them he might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and seal that promise.”

⁴ The Belgic Confession: Article 34: “The Sacrament of Baptism ... Baptism also witnesses to us that God, being our gracious Father, will be our God forever...”

⁵ From the RCA Baptismal Liturgy when the minister speaks to the infant being baptized, “N (*use Christian name; omit surname*), For you Jesus Christ came into the world; for you he died and for you he conquered death; All this he did for you, little one, though you know nothing of it as yet. We love because God first loved us.”

⁶ From the RCA Baptismal Liturgy... the questions for the parents, “Do you promise to instruct *this child/these children* in the truth of God’s word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for *them*, to teach *them* to pray; and to train *them* in Christ’s way by your example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church?” and for the church-wide membership “Do you promise to love, encourage, and support *these brothers and sisters* by teaching the gospel of God’s love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God’s family in fellowship, prayer, and service?”

⁷ Ephesians 4:4-6, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Galatians 3:27-28, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Genesis 17:7, “I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” Acts 2:39, “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

Likewise, the love we return to God and our sisters and brothers is freely given in response to God's gracious love expressed in the redemptive life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ⁸.

4. **Mission** – Since the earliest days of the Reformed Church in America, the Church has been at her best when her gaze is directed outward. Our impassioned engagement in mission grows not from a need for expansion, self-preservation or savior-confusion, but from a profound resonance with God's love for the whole world. The culture is God's transformative arena; we engage the culture around us in hopes of being generative agents, of being positively transformed ourselves and of embodying the love of Christ for all the world to see.⁹
5. **Scripture** – Reformed Christians are deeply invested in scripture because God's deep desire for relationship finds consistent expression in the Word. This is most profoundly evident in the person of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the scriptural witness sufficiently reveals God's good purposes for the redemption of the world. We trust Scripture and engage dynamically in listening for the Holy Spirit's voice.¹⁰ At the same time, Reformed Christians appreciate that God's voice is not limited to scripture and resonates throughout creation and the human mind.¹¹

⁸ Belgic Confession, Article 24, "So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls "faith working through love," [Galatians 5:6] which moves people to do by themselves the works that God has commanded in the Word." I John 4: 7-12, especially, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another." Galatians 5: 1 & 13, "For freedom Christ has set us free... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another."

⁹ Confession of Belhar (selected):

"2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family. We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2:11-22); that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16); that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered. ..."

"3. We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world... We believe that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred... and will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world. Therefore, we reject any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation; which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church."

"4. We believe that God is revealed as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people... and that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need..."

¹⁰ The Belgic Confession: Article 5: The Authority of Scripture, "We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith. And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them— not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God."

¹¹ The Belgic Confession, Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God, "We know God by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book

6. **Sovereignty** – The Reformed tradition recognizes that the cosmos was created for God’s good and gracious purposes and ultimately only God decides how to order the cosmos and how to govern God’s own household.¹² This reality finds expression both in our fidelity to God and in our willingness to follow where God leads as creation continues to unfold.¹³

in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without excuse. Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation.”

¹² Belgic Confession, Article 12, “God has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance and their various functions for serving their Creator. Even now God also sustains and governs them all, according to his eternal providence and by his infinite power, that they may serve humanity, in order that humanity may serve God.” HC Q&A 27, “**Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?** A. The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.” HC Q&A 28, “**Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?** A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love. For all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.”

¹³ Acts 11:15-17, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”